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KAL Flight 007:

The case against: Key assumptions don't match facts

By Charles W. Corddry

"P Q. Mann" has left no coincidence unturned in setting up a spy theory for the Korean airliner case.

When this or that detail obstinately refuses to fit, the author perceives some sinister reason, and squeezes the detail into the theory anyway. The sole possibility that the author's widespread net misses is that of a totally nonpolitical navigational error on the Koreans' part. That explanation for Flight 007 is too simple, and is in fact scorned.

In the end, the author arrives precisely at square one, getting us all stirred up along the way but never flatly claiming that it really happened as the article implies that it must have.

In the recesses of government, among intelligence and other specialists who never emerge from anonymity, the nimble intellectual exercise is put down as "disinformation," and the author does indeed speak approvingly of an "extended analysis" in the Communist Party publication, *Pravda*, which was technically detailed and "was not presented" as propaganda.

The speculation is further viewed in such quarters as a fabrication in a literal sense; that is, many parts have been assembled into a whole that is untrue.

These reactions may be harsh. In any event, if the entire conspiracy case could be proved, the U.S. government is not where one would turn for the proof. (This does not, on the other hand, argue for an uncritical acceptance of *Pravda*.)

The case advanced in *Defence Attache* stands or falls on three assumptions:

□ 1. That the United States in 1964 attempted to coordinate military aircraft penetrations of East German air space with the passage overhead of an electromagnetic-reconnaissance satellite. The satellite would tape-record the radar signals of the alerted Communist air defense system, obtaining valuable information. Such spacecraft are called ELINT (for electronic intelligence) or Ferret satellites.

□ 2. That the United States, in the 007 case in 1983, managed an exquisite piece of timing for a combined spacecraft and aircraft intelligence mission, in the 1964 mold. A Ferret satellite and the space shuttle Challenger were positioned in the sky respectively to record air defense activity generated by the airplane's intrusion and to per-

form a "command, control and communications role in the conducting of the extended intelligence operation. . . ."

□ 3. That a U.S. Air Force RC-135 reconnaissance plane and the Korean 747 airliner flew a "coincident flight path" on August 31 from 16.00 Greenwich Mean Time until about 16.10 GMT, the latter time being 20 minutes before the Korean approached the Kamchatka coast. This was a "dummy-selling tactic," supposed to make the Russian air defense system first see an "apparently military" plane approaching and go into high gear, only to discover later that it was a civilian that actually had entered Soviet air space.

These assumptions can be examined in some detail:

□ 1. What if the 1964 satellite, to which such importance is attached as a precedent, was not a Ferret? Best available evidence is that it was in fact a weather satellite.

The U.S. Air Force launched a satellite, unidentified at the time, from Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., on January 19, 1964, as "P.Q. Mann" says. The Mann contention is that this vehicle had the orbital characteristics of a Ferret and that it was intended to record Soviet radar signals when an American T-39 aircraft penetrated East Germany on January 28.

The satellite "would have been" in optimum position to record, but the plane was shot down 2¼ minutes too soon. This is one of those coincidences forced to fit the theory. Undaunted by failure, the Americans tried again on March 10 and had an RB-66 aircraft shot down.

The argument hangs more, however, on whether the satellite was a Ferret; never mind whether the Americans knew how to time their aircraft flights to a satellite's precise orbital time.

In the first book written on spy satellites, *Secret Sentinels in Space*, Philip J. Klass, an electrical engineer and specialist in aviation and space electronics, explains in detail why ELINT vehicles' best orbiting altitudes are in the 200-to 300-mile range — not too high for receiving radio and radar signals, but high enough for several years of orbital life. Both the U.S. and Russia appear to have settled on 300-mile orbits for Ferrets. Mr. Klass listed no Ferret as launched in January, 1964, and sees no reason to change that now.

The satellite launched on January 19, 1964, had an altitude ranging from 498 to 515 miles, and an orbital inclination of 99 degrees. These are the orbital characteristics of weather satellites and the one in question, known as 1964-2B, is catalogued by the

Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress as a weather satellite.

□ 2. It becomes a challenge, therefore, to accept "P.Q. Mann's" view that in retrospect the 1964 incidents "tend to validate" the *Pravda* analysis showing coordination last August between a Ferret and 007. The skies are full of ELINT satellites, of course, and the chance is excellent that every night they pass over airliners on the Anchorage-to-Far East air routes.

By *Pravda's* portrayal, however, the assumed U.S. "Ferret-D" made three passes in polar orbits over the scene of the 007 incident, and each time was within recording distance for 6 to 8 minutes. This was, certainly, a high-risk, low-gain undertaking: sending an airliner of another country, with 269 persons aboard, into an adversary's air defense zone so that a satellite could record the radar and radio activity for brief minutes.

This is so, one can argue, for two reasons: The United States already has a storehouse of information on the Soviet military complex in the Kamchatka-Sakhalin area. This information is constantly updated by flights of RC-135 aircraft that can stay airborne for hours on end recording whatever fills the air, tracking missile shots, etc.

Pravda did not mention the shuttle Challenger, an omission that the *Defence Attache* author sees as an ace withheld for possible later use. "P.Q. Mann" argues, however, that the shuttle must have been making an experimental run as a military command and control vehicle.

One can only surmise how busy the shuttle crew must have been that day, August 31. This was the day that the five-man crew ejected into orbit a \$43 million weather-forecasting and communications satellite for India, which India paid the United States \$10 million to do. It was the scheduling of this operation, by the way, according to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), that determined the shuttle's night launch time — a first that *Defence Attache* writer seemingly found significant for the spy-plane theory.

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